Schoolscapes

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Work Begins on Secondary School Programs

Robert Bisaillon

Some three hundred teachers, school administrators and pedagogical consultants from throughout Québec gathered in Saint-Hyacinthe to begin work on developing the new secondary school programs. Robert Bisaillon, deputy minister for preschool, elementary and secondary education, began his opening address by welcoming them to the "great adventure" on which they were embarking.

To help the participants put their work into perspective, Bisaillon presented three broad questions: Why do we need a reform in education? What does the education reform involve? What are the challenges of the education reform for secondary education?

Why do we need a reform in education?

The simple answer to this question is that the status quo is longer adequate. We can neither go back to the past, out of nostalgia for a time when things were supposedly better, nor demand to maintain the present situation, out of fear of change. We have no choice but to look to the future.

Bisaillon pointed out that curriculum reform is only part of the education reform—although it is the part that most concerns teachers—and that some of the other parts are already in place. These include full-time day-care, after-school childcare services and the amendment of the Education Act, not only in the reorganization of the school boards but also in the redistribution of powers. He stressed that no country in the OECD gives teachers as much power as they possess in Québec.

Bisaillon's short answer to the first question is simple: if teachers are not able to look to the future, and to prepare their students for the future, then the teaching profession will lose its raison d'être and will disappear.

What does the education reform involve?

This is a reform in which the priority is placed on learning. This paradigm shift from teaching to learning has come about as a result of new research in educational psychology. The emphasis is on intellectual activity by students as opposed to the passive consumption of knowledge; the ability to make connections between different subjects; the ability to transfer learning to different situations; and the ability, finally, to understand the world in all its complexity. This new paradigm gives rise to an ethical, moral and professional responsibility for teachers.

It is for this reason that the mission of the school has been redefined. The mission to provide instruction is meant to be understood in the broadest sense. A competency involves the ability to demonstrate learning acquired by transferring it to a variety of situations. The emphasis on competencies does not mean ignoring knowledge, but rather putting it into perspective and connecting it to the real world.

The school's mission to socialize arises out of the fact that young people will not live in a village or a region—their job market and their learning context will be the world. They have to learn to live with people with various cultures, various values, various backgrounds. The school is the first place where they encounter rules of conduct for life in society. Even though teachers are concerned with subject content, students are individuals, and schools cannot escape the obligation to educate them to be citizens.

The school's mission to provide qualifications is equally important. Bisaillon stated that the fact that Québec students do as well as or better than those in other countries should not distract us from the more troubling fact that in many areas a substantial proportion of students do not graduate from secondary school. The school system has to consider how the choices it offers young people, the pedagogical practices it uses and the support it provides can make school more meaningful for these young people and provide them with qualifications.

Marie-Claude Sarrazin

Voices of the Younger Generation

A rather unusual part of the proceedings was the presence of two highly successful young people who spoke of their own experience as students. They were Marie-Claude Sarrazin, a law student and social activist, and Marc Boutet, a young entrepreneur. Nicole Gagnon had asked them to answer two questions: What challenges should young people have to meet in school? What kind of schools do young people need?

Marie-Claude Sarrazin, 25, is a founding member of the youth committee of the Fédération des femmes du Québec, a member of the board of directors of the Centre de développement pour l'exercice de la citoyenneté and the youngest member of the Estates-General on Language.

Sarrazin began with the confession that she didn't remember much of what she learned in high school, at least in terms of subject knowledge. What did stay with her, however, was "ways of being and models" provided by various teachers. She still has warm memories of a history teacher who introduced her to politics, a philosophy teacher who gave her a first taste of the great issues in ethics, and others who taught her to ask questions and gave her self-confidence.

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Work Begins on Secondary School Programs (Con.)

Bisaillon stressed that this reform means a qualitative change in the role of teachers, and, that, contrary to some people's fears, it will add value to the teaching profession. It represents an extraordinary challenge for teachers, in terms not only of the competencies but also of the degree of responsibility and ethical conduct it demands of them.

Bisaillon reminded the participants that if, despite all the obstacles, the elementary education program produces the kind of students it aims to produce, then secondary school teachers will find themselves in a very different situation from today. Their students will have played an active role in their learning, and they will make demands on their teachers. But the fact that this is the Internet generation makes the role of the teacher even more important, because with students doing more distance learning, the teacher has an essential role to play as a mediator between the students and their knowledge.

The challenge for schools—and also for teachers as individuals—is that of becoming communities of learners. This is exactly the challenge Bisaillon made to the participants in the program development process. While he conceded that the experience may at first be destabilizing for teachers, this destabilization is a prerequisite for the construction of knowledge that is at the core of the learning experience.

The role of teachers in the program development process constitutes a recognition of their knowledge, expertise and experience and proves that, far from devaluing teachers, the education reform draws on their intellectual curiosity, professional commitment and openness to new approaches.

Voices of the Younger Generation (Con.)

Marc Boutet

According to this dynamic young woman, what students need from school is support in discovering who they are, what they want in life, and what they are capable of achieving. She feels she received this in her education, but wants to see other young people who were not as lucky given the same opportunity.

Marc Boutet founded his own software company, De marque inc., at the age of 14. In 1999, he was awarded the Arista Sun Life Prize for young entrepreneurship. He has created some 40 jobs, most of them held by young people.

Boutet was one of four co-chairs of the Québec Youth Summit, and he co-chaired the summit's work on employment for young people.

For Boutet, confidence is the basis of success. "At 15," he says, "I was crazy about music and computers. I met someone who believed in the potential of young people." This was the person who got him involved in developing a software program for a school board, which led to the founding of his company. A physics teacher taught him that "it's not the formulas that are important, it's the method of problem solving." He particularly remembers certain teachers who gave their time to extracurricular activities—one who worked with the student newspaper and another who coordinated the student band. And it was a teacher who asked him to put his computer skills to use by teaching younger students how to work with computers.

Boutet is not shy about stating what he thinks schools should be giving young people. He has a list of skills needed for success as an entrepreneur: the ability to communicate and convince, to write texts, to sell yourself, to communicate in other languages such as English and Spanish, to create and imagine, to plan, to manage information, to manage individuals and teams, to work as part of a team, to make quick decisions, to perform well. To provide all this, schools must not only be open to the world, they must bring the world into the classroom. It's a tall order!

Sarrazin and Boutet are examples of young people who made the most of their education, and have tried to give back some of what they received by helping other young people. They are both strong believers in the value of education. After all, as Sarrazin points out, "school is at the heart of democratic institutions."

The Québec Education Program

Preparing Young People for the 21st Century

Nicole Gagnon

As part of the two-day meeting of the secondary school program development committees in Saint-Hyacinthe on February 1 and 2, Nicole Gagnon gave a presentation on the challenges facing the school in the 21st century, the response of the Québec Education Program to these challenges, and the key place of the Program of programs in the Québec Education Program.

Since schools have to prepare young people to play an active role in a complex world, Gagnon began by looking at some major worldwide trends: the globalization of economies and cultures, the emergence of the knowledge-based society and the increasing complexity of human relations. These far-reaching trends, Gagnon said, give rise to rapid, unpredictable change and bewildering new choices, and affect all our lives. They also open up new possibilities, especially for young people.

To take their place in this brave new world, young people need a comprehensive approach to education. Students need to learn to learn, so that they can continue learning throughout their lives. They need to acquire the intellectual skills that will enable them to understand and act on their physical and human environment. They need to learn how to organize their actions and carry out projects to completion. They must learn to live together with others, respecting their differences. And they must learn to communicate adequately in more than one language.

At a time when the proliferation of knowledge seems to require that more time be given to each subject, Gagnon said, the only way teachers can find time to deal with competencies that go beyond individual subjects is by making connections among the different subjects. Otherwise, she said, students' learning will be nothing but "islands of knowledge in a vast sea of ignorance."

Gagnon pointed out that the new curriculum is specifically designed to make these connections. First of all, the emphasis on teachers' collective responsibility means that teachers will have to work more closely together. The fact that the entire program is written in a common language means that there is already a consistency from subject to subject. Finally, the opening up of the school to the community and the wider world enables teachers to make connections between school learning and "real life."

The program identifies the essential learnings in each subject and favours the coordination and complementarity of teaching practices. Gagnon stressed that it calls for teachers with a high degree of professionalism. In contrast to the encyclopedic approach, which involves listing all important knowledge to be acquired, or the objective-based approach, which involves making an exhaustive list of the knowledge, skills and behaviours targeted in each subject, the *Québec Education Program* is based on a cognitive approach to education, in which the basic processes required for student learning are identified.

In one comprehensive program the *Québec Education Program* integrates the essential competencies and content in each subject, the cross-curricular competencies that are needed in all the subjects and in everyday life, and the broad areas of learning young people will need as individuals, citizens and workers in the 21st century. It provides an essential frame of reference for teachers' activities.

The secondary school program, Gagnon pointed out, will share the same underlying principles and the same structure as the elementary school program, with adaptations or additions to take into account the students' level of development and to facilitate its use in the development of higher levels of competencies through both regular and extracurricular activities.

The Program of programs defines the cross-curricular competencies and areas of lifelong learning.

The cross-curricular competencies are the tools young people will need to participate constructively in the modern world:

Intellectual competencies
- To use information
- To solve problems
- To exercise critical judgment
- To be creative

Methodological competencies
- To use effective work methods
- To use information and communications technologies

Personal and social competencies
- To develop his/her personal identity
- To maintain harmonious interpersonal relations
- To work with others
- To demonstrate a sense of ethics

Communication-related competencies
- To communicate appropriately

The areas of lifelong learning make connections between the school and the real world:
World-view
Health and well-being
Personal and career planning
Social relationships
Environmental awareness
Consumer rights and responsibilities
Media literacy
Citizenship and community life

The Program of programs can serve as a reference to help teachers coordinate their activities and see that they cover all the essential elements of the cross-curricular competencies and areas of lifelong learning. It may be used by individual teachers and school teams to plan and monitor their activities, by students to play a conscious role in their education, by parents to enhance their cooperation with the school—and by program developers to make connections.

The Logic of Competencies

In a presentation at the Saint-Hyacinthe meeting of the secondary-level program development committees, Université de Montréal professor Marie-Françoise Legendre explained the underlying aims, nature and implications of a competency-based approach.

When Legendre first began teaching Piaget's education theory in university, her students told her, "We've already seen all that in CEGEP." The students' reaction made her realize that there are different ways of relating to knowledge: we can have a constructive relationship, where we view what we've learned as a starting point for building more knowledge, or a we can have a consumer relationship, where we consume knowledge and then move on to something else. "I believe it is the school's responsibility to help students establish a relationship with knowledge in which they are not simply consumers," said Legendre.

It was in this perspective that Legendre gave her presentation, "The Logic of Competencies," whose purpose was to explain the underlying rationale of the competency-based approach, "because it's not simply a technique or method for developing programs, nor is it about substituting one set of terms for another." She therefore focused on six questions: Why use a competency-based program? What is a competency? Why distinguish between subject-specific and cross-curricular competencies? Why refer to areas of lifelong learning? What are the major implications of a competency-based program? How can we implement a competency-based program?

The choice of a competency-based approach

The two main reasons for a competency-based approach are to avoid certain pitfalls of objective-based programs and to focus on comprehensive, long-term educational goals, said Legendre.

"Of course, just because we're in a competency-based program does not mean we no longer have clear objectives. We always teach with a purpose." However, objective-based programs tend to have a sequential, linear, fragmented approach to learning, dividing learning into little pieces without necessarily connecting them or giving them real meaning. This approach often leads to a proliferation of objectives, and students tend to learn according to how they will be evaluated.

The competency-based approach stems from a different conception of learning. It emphasizes the importance of helping students see the relevance of what they are learning by explicitly linking learning to a variety of meaningful contexts. It aims to help students in their overall development, which includes the personal, cognitive, affective and social levels. It aims to make students "lifelong learners" by giving them the tools to build on their knowledge, and to provide them with an education that goes beyond school walls.

"Learning doesn't begin with teaching and it doesn't end with teaching," said Legendre. "Students must not only be able to transfer what they've learned to situations outside of school, but they must be able to draw on knowledge and competencies they've acquired outside of school when they are in an academic environment."

The competency-based approach therefore requires that schools focus on teaching students to think, stressing their learning processes and the meaning of knowledge in relation to the various contexts and conditions in which it is used.

What is a competency?

The Québec Education Program defines a competency as "a set of behaviours based on the mobilization and effective use of a set of resources."

Legendre explained that a competency is much more than a skill, as it consists of intellectual action as well. It draws on a wide variety of resources, which include knowledge but are certainly not limited to knowledge. "Just because you know something doesn't mean you know what to do with it," she explained.

The resources students learn to mobilize may be internal or external. Internal resources are the student's personal resources, such as their knowledge, interests and aptitudes. External resources may come from within or outside the school. Depending on their family and social environments, not all students have access to the same external resources, which can have a tremendous impact on their work. "Obviously, I will be much more competent at writing a text on a given topic if I have access to books and other resources on that topic."

The two types of resources are intrinsically linked. "I may not understand or know how to use an external resource if I lack certain internal resources. Conversely, an external resource may help me develop an internal one."

To complete the definition of a competency, it is important to understand that a competency is intimately related to the contexts in which it is used and the situations it enables students to handle.

Characteristics of a competency

Competencies have many characteristics, Legendre explained. They are complex, in that they cannot be reduced to a sum of components but are concerned with the dynamic interaction of these components, i.e. the way in which the students orchestrate the various resources. "It is important to remember that what seems simple to us may not be simple for the learner," she noted. "We tend to forget how we originally developed a particular competency."

A competency is progressive, because it continues to change and develop. "Competencies are not being developed simply in terms of moving on to the next grade level, but in terms of the entire learning process, even beyond school. This is what we mean by long-term, comprehensive goals."

It is interactive, because it is intrinsically linked to the contexts in which it is used and is further developed through these contexts and situations. Furthermore, as students develop the competency, the type and number of contexts in which they can apply it grow.

It is comprehensive and favours integrated learning, because it makes use of knowledge but cannot be reduced to knowledge: it is the whole that gives meaning to the parts. "This is equally true of the education program," said Legendre. "We must never lose sight of the whole." ● (EK)

Cross-curricular subject-specific competencies

It important not only to distinguish between cross-curricular and subject-specific competencies, said Legendre, but also to understand how they relate to each other.

"A competency is specific when it has a relatively limited field of application." She gave the example of a specialist who develops certain competencies for his or her work that have no applications in everyday life. A competency is generic, or cross-curricular, when it has a broad field of application. Usually, the contexts in which this type of competency is acquired are quite varied. The best example is children learning their mother tongue. "They do not start learning to talk in a particular, well-defined context and then move on to other contexts; they learn the language in an immeasurably varied number of situations."

Some competencies that are initially specific may become cross-curricular as their field of application is widened. For example, computers initially belonged to a very specialized field, but their field of application now includes a wide variety of contexts. In the same way, a general or cross-curricular competency, such as communication, can become specific when it is applied in a very specific context, such as journalism. "In other words, competencies are not necessarily just one type or another; they do not have a sequence, nor are they linear."

In order to acquire subject-specific competencies, students need to mobilize cross-curricular competencies. "To learn, students must be intellectually active. They must reason, solve problems, be creative, be critical. Cross-curricular competencies are therefore tools for acquiring subject-specific competencies." By the same token, Legendre said, subject-specific competencies help students develop cross-curricular competencies. "A competency is not necessarily cross-curricular right away. It may become cross-curricular as the student learns to apply it in different contexts."

It is important to relate cross-curricular and subject-specific competencies, because this process will not necessarily happen spontaneously or automatically, said Legendre. "Teachers must support students in this so as to target the development of high-level competencies."

Linking competencies promotes integrated learning and collaboration and teamwork among teachers and specialists. "In several cases during the workshops, different teachers said, 'My field is the ideal one for developing this competency.' It became clear that each field is ideal, but in different and complementary ways." She added that this shift requires not only restructuring programs or the school, but also changing the general mindset in our schools.

Relating competencies to each other also means being more attentive to the common elements in different subjects. "We tend to look at things through the lens of our own discipline," Legendre noted. "This is obviously important and constitutes our expertise. But the danger is that we may feel threatened when a problem exceeds our field of expertise. Most problems are complex and not strictly subject-specific. We need to be open and to pool the expertise and contributions of various disciplines if we want our students to be able to look at problems using several different lenses."

Just as teachers need to take collective responsibility for developing students' competencies, they must realize that they do not have absolute control over students' learning. "We are part of a complex process that goes beyond our teaching activities." (EK)

Why refer to areas of lifelong learning?

It is important to take into account who students are and the environment they are growing up in. "Each student is unique, and we must recognize these differences. The goal of school should not be to make them all the same, but to build on each student's personal strengths."

School should also provide students with tools to help them deal with the problems they face in a complex world. "One of the reasons for the education reform is that we are very aware of significant and rapid changes that have occurred in our environment," said Legendre. "We cannot ignore these changes; we do not live in the same world today as fifteen or twenty years ago. And because students are in continual interaction with this environment and develop through this interaction, we must take this environment into account."

The areas of lifelong learning outlined in the Québec Education Program represent elements that characterize this environment. For example, "Consumer Rights and Responsibilities" recognizes that young people today live in a consumer society and are constantly solicited from all sides. "They do not have the same relationship with money as previous generations," said Legendre. The area of "Personal and Career Planning" is a response to the fact that most people no longer hold permanent, stable jobs, and may even switch careers several times during their lifetime.

The areas of lifelong learning therefore refer to complex problems which students face and for which they need to develop tools—values, behaviours, competencies. They go hand-in-hand with the cross-curricular competencies, which are not meant as exhaustive descriptions, but as reference points for pedagogical activities. The ultimate goal is "to help students develop the tools essential for their personal development and for constructing their own world-view." (EK)

Implications competency-based approach

Implementing a competency-based approach means supporting the development of competencies. This is achieved by working on the students' internal and external resources and the mobilization of these resources in various situations.

"Teachers have an enormous responsibility to help students become aware of their personal resources and build on them," said Legendre. In the same way, teachers should help students become aware of external human and material resources. But the process does not stop there: teachers must help students learn how to access and make use of these resources.

A competency-based approach also implies a radical shift from the traditional approach to evaluation. Evaluation becomes a part of learning, supporting the learning process. "In other words, it is used to regulate the students' learning processes rather than as a means for selection and certification of learning."

Evaluation is obviously a very complex process, requiring the proper tools. However, Legendre said teachers must trust their own professional expertise. "We tend to be very dependent on external instruments, but as professionals, our best instruments are in our heads—our knowledge, our representations and our understanding of the learning process." Like doctors, teachers must develop their observation and diagnostic skills.

This evaluation process applies to the teacher's pedagogical practices and strategies as well. Because it is not always possible to predict the results or scope of a pedagogical practice, teachers must continually evaluate the results and adjust their teaching accordingly. "This exercise, carried out either with the students or through personal reflection, can be extremely useful," said Legendre.

In order to support students' learning, it is essential that evaluation remain consistent with the characteristics of competencies: it too must be complex, progressive, interactive, comprehensive and based on integrated learning.

For instance, teachers may wish to focus on specific elements at certain times, the overall judgment must be based on the whole, i.e. the interaction of the various elements. Nor should the evaluation be separate from learning. "In the dominant culture of evaluation, first we teach, then students learn, then we evaluate. There are times for learning and times for evaluation, and the two must not be confused," said Legendre. "But in reality, when a student is in a learning situation, the teacher is in an ideal position to see what is really going on and to make an accurate diagnosis." By the same token, certain evaluation situations can serve as excellent learning opportunities for the student.

Competencies should always be evaluated in context, given that the resources mobilized depend on the context in which they are used. As well, because competencies are complex, the situations should be rich, varied and complex. "We need to get out of the mindset that says students need to acquire knowledge before being placed in a complex situation. Sometimes we need to be placed in a situation with a certain degree of complexity and difficulty, if only to realize that there are elements we are lacking and need to learn." It follows that, when evaluating students, teachers should take into account any other competencies that become evident, even if they were not the original intention of the learning or evaluation situation. (EK)

Keys to implementing competency-based program

One of the keys to implementing the *Québec Education Program* will be ensuring that people grasp the spirit of the program.

For instance, teachers must learn to consider knowledge as a resource for developing competencies. "Knowledge must not be dissociated from the conditions and situations in which it is used," said Legendre. Furthermore, teachers must understand the close link between the acquisition of knowledge and the development of the thinking process. "This is dependant on the acquisition of knowledge, but at the same time, it is through the development of thinking skills that new knowledge becomes accessible."

Certain conditions must also be created in order for the new program to be implemented successfully. For instance, the role of students must change. "Whether they are aware of it or not, students have developed strategies for succeeding in school without really learning," said Legendre. "We tend to avoid cognitive conflict. We therefore need to develop new relationships with knowledge."

Most importantly, we must trust and rely on teachers' competence and professional autonomy. "Ultimately, what happens in the classroom is the teacher's responsibility," Legendre said. She therefore warned members of the program development committees not to be too prescriptive in their writing but to concentrate instead on making the overall vision of the program very transparent. "The transition will be much smoother if teachers are able to make the spirit of the program theirs."

Legendre concluded by pointing out that a competency-based approach also concerns the professional competencies of the teachers themselves. Quoting Philippe Perrenoud, she said, "professional competency involves going beyond prescribed behaviour." (EK)

Development Process

Margaret Rioux-Dolan, director of the Direction de la formation générale des jeunes of the MEQ, focused on the concrete organization of the process of developing the secondary school curriculum. She began by recalling the emphasis the program places on students' overall education, with contributions from the various subject areas and guided by the Program of programs. The ultimate aim is educational success as well as personal growth for all students.

The secondary school curriculum is a continuation of the preschool, elementary and secondary education program. Hence the process will be the same as that used for the preschool and elementary curriculum, which Rioux-Dolan declared highly effective in terms of both the programs produced and the impact in the schools.

The program for each subject area will be drafted by a team made up of teachers, pedagogical consultants and administrators from the schools, as well as university professors and professionals from the MEQ. Four hundred people answered the call for participants, and some three hundred were chosen, with the aim of drawing on a wide variety of expertise and experience. Each committee has representatives of school boards from every region of Québec, including English-speaking school boards, and a representative of the private schools; some members have special expertise in such areas as special education, cultural communities, information and communications technologies, vocational education. Finally, a subject specialist from the MEQ coordinates the committee's work, seconded by an expert in evaluation.

The role of the committee members is threefold: to express their ideas on content and give feedback on proposals; to gather comments from colleagues to bring into the discussion; and to play a role in future training activities on the new curriculum.

Rioux-Dolan ended by defining the purpose of these two days of reflection and discussion: to situate the curriculum in the education reform, update the participants' knowledge of the Québec Education Program, and to familiarize them with their mandate. She pointed out that the materials distributed included a sheet for any questions they might have in the course of the workshops, to be handed in to the workshop leader at the end of the two days.

Grassroots Input

In the coming months, the program development committees—known as the *équipes d'élaboration*—will play a vital role in drafting the secondary school curriculum. "These people are really being counted on to give grassroots, from-the-classroom feedback," said Abigail Anderson, coordinator for English Language Arts.

The program development committees are composed of teachers, pedagogical consultants, school administrators, university professors and professionals from the MEQ. There is one committee for each subject area in secondary school.

The selection process was very decentralized, Anderson explained. "The assistant deputy minister, Robert Bisaillon, sent out letters to the school boards last summer inviting them to submit names of people interested in representing the board and its teachers on the committees."

By November, long lists had come back to the MEQ, containing the names of everyone who wanted to be on one committee or another. The names were categorized by discipline. "We then just went ahead and sent out the letters of invitation. But we also checked to make sure that every region in the province and most school boards were represented.

"Almost everybody proposed was taken, except for cases where there was more than one person from a school board wanting to do the same thing. For example, if you had four people wanting to do English Language Arts, you took one. But the choice was pretty arbitrary."

She estimates that close to 350 teachers are involved. Each committee has representatives of school boards from every region of Québec, at least one representative of the English-language school boards, and a representative of the private schools; one or more members have special expertise in such areas as special education, cultural communities, information and communications technologies or vocational education, or come from the CEGEP or university level. A subject specialist from the MEQ coordinates the committee's work, seconded by an expert in evaluation. "There is a minimum of 14 people per committee," Anderson noted.

The English Language Arts committee, which Anderson coordinates, is slightly different from the others, because a consultative committee has existed since 1970. "So for the program development committee, we took a quorum of the existing consultative committee and added the names of people from regions or groups that were not represented and that should be in this type of process in terms of English Language Arts."

The program development committees are to act as consultative bodies for the drafting of the new secondary curriculum. "But I mean consultative in the deepest sense of the term," Anderson emphasized. "All the coordinators of curriculum will work with their writing teams. The writing teams will then bring drafts of what they're writing back to the development teams for input. In that sense it's really a tandem."

It is up to the committees to promote their vision of secondary curriculum in their subject area. "They are really being counted on to give grassroots, from-the-classroom feedback. From our point of view, these are really important groups."

It is also hoped that committee members will play a role in informing their communities. "Because in a lot of ways, they'll have the inside story."

The committees met for the first time in Saint-Hyacinthe on February 1 and 2. They will meet a number of times between now and June. The new curriculum is scheduled to be integrated into Secondary Cycle One—which comprises Secondary I, II and III—starting in 2002-2003, and to be fully applied starting in 2003-2004. (In a few subject areas, it will be integrated starting only in 2003-2004 and 2004-2005.)

Judging from the process at the elementary level, committee members are in for a very enriching and positive experience. "I think the elementary people really enjoyed being part of a bigger community of teachers at the sessions where we all came together," said Anderson. "The majority continue to be important resources for their communities."

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